

STATINTL

The Demands of Heroism

Men feel a natural disinclination to intrude in the personal tragedy of another, especially when one's only comment must be a qualified kind of criticism or censure. But Oliver Powers has now made his personal tragedy a national cause; he is circulating a petition in parts of Virginia to have our government take action for the release of his son, Francis Gary Powers, convicted U-2 spy now imprisoned in Russia. Mr. Powers accuses the State Department of inaction, of "doing nothing to get my son out of Russia."

The Russians have so far been lenient to Powers. As a convicted spy he normally would have been shot. But Powers cooperated with his captors, who have found a more useful purpose for him alive than dead. That purpose is the discrediting of our government. When the elder Powers takes up the criticism of the nation, he is unconsciously fulfilling his part of the Soviet plan.

It is difficult to expect of any man a degree of heroism which no one can be sure of possessing himself. But there are certain situations which demand heroism, and that demand must be upheld if we are to preserve our standards of national honor. This is true of a man who breaks under the stress of battle, who runs, who deserts his comrades, who informs to an enemy. It is also true of a professional and highly paid spy who, when caught,

cooperates with a propaganda show staged to discredit his country.

The senior Mr. Powers is a man of courage and independence, who displays many qualities regarded as peculiarly American. But he misconceives the role that his son has played in the relations between the two major nations of the contemporary world; he misconceives the duty of his own government.

That he should do all in his power to help his son is what we expect of such a firm and self-reliant man. But when he tries publicly to make American foreign policy, or to pressure the State Department with petitions demanding freedom for his son, those who are asked to sign should quietly say no. This is to the advantage of the Powers family, since the Russians will release Powers only when he has served their propaganda purpose. The more stir made about unfair treatment of him by his own government, the longer he will be dangled before the world as a suffering victim of the capitalist aggressors who so cynically used him.

Francis Gary Powers said in public court, with the world watching, that he was ashamed of his country and of what he had done. In the years to come, he will be ashamed of that statement. Let his father, through well-intentioned but ill-designed actions, not give him cause for further shame.

CPYRGHT